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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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MID-WINTER REVERIE

Here's a thought to keep you warm and comfortable, one picked up in a casual conversation in the Mammal Division of the Royal Ontario Museum. If you are inclined to think of winter as a quiescent period when wild creatures are tucked away in cozy dens in a fairyland forest--listen to this:

Winter is the season when northern animals are severely put to the test. Cold and hunger and deep snow will be their lot. Only the most hardy and tough, the swift and the crafty will see the dawn of spring.

Try to imagine yourself as one of the wild creatures residing on latitude 50° north, in January. There you crouch in the forest at night, with an empty stomach. The temperature is dropping rapidly and the wind, through groaning branches, sifts ice crystals in your eyes. From far and near explosive reports from freezing tree-trunks confuse your alert attention. Whether you be hunted or hunter, your objective is to eat. And sooner or later eat you must if you would live.

Of course, some animals like the bear and chipmunk escape this situation by hibernation, a false sleep or state of torpor, but not so the hare and the lynx, the red squirrel and the marten, the deer and the wolf. To be active in winter on latitude 50° north, these animals must have sharp eyes, sensitive ears, and speed enough to escape their enemies or catch their prey. All these attributes and more must be kept at concert pitch at night in a frigid forest. There will be some which will go days on end with an empty stomach.

With this in mind your reporter glanced through the office window at a snowy landscape and dreaded going out for a short-order lunch.

HAS AN OYSTER A FAMILY TREE? Why certainly. Many of them have trees dating away back into prehistory to a time long before the coming of man, and they can prove it by their shells! In the Royal Ontario Museum shells of oysters that lived over 100,000,000 years ago may be seen. Some especially large fossil oysters on exhibit in the galleries of palaeontology are nearly a foot in length and they may reach one or more inches in thickness. What a feast one of them would have provided on the half shell.

VISITING HOURS AT MUSEUM

Week days except Monday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sundays 2 p.m. - 5 p.m.
Closed all day Monday.

CHINESE PORCELAIN

What does the world owe to China? It is not unduly straining the truth to say that the world owes more to China than China owes to the world, despite the scientific progress of the modern western world.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of China to the world has been the manufacture and development of porcelain and hard-glaze pottery. It needs but a glance over the vital statistics of Europe to realize what a profound influence was brought to bear upon the health of the people and the consequent prolongation of life, when porcelain ware was introduced into Europe from China. The common wooden platters and rough-surfaced pots and jugs, conducive to the harbouring of deadly germs, gave place to the clean, smooth-surfaced porcelains, so that life-averages at once soared upwards.

The finest porcelain of China was produced in the Sung period, from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries,--the period leading up to the date of the signing of the Magna Charta in England,-and the porcelain wares of that time have never been surpassed in quality of body and glaze, and the perfect balance of form and colour.

Sixteen pieces of Sung porcelain, on loan from the famous collection of Imperial Palace wares of Sir Perceval David, Bart., have just been received and are now on view in the Chinese Fresco Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

New Year's Greetings 2500 Years Ago

Among the large number of glazed objects in the Royal Ontario Museum's Egyptian collection are three flasks of unusual form. They are circular in outline with flattened convex sides and they are decorated with delicately carved bands below the short, narrow neck and around the edges. The neck is flanked by tiny handles in the shape of monkeys. Bottles of this distinctive type are known as "New Year flasks," because they often bear the inscription: "May the gods open a happy year for my master."

Although lentil-shaped bottles slightly resembling these appear at an earlier date, the "New Year flask," conforming to a rigid design, is confined to the Saite period (663-525 B. C.), when Egypt had already seen 2000 years of high civilization and was on the road to decay. It was, however, enjoying a short period of independence during which it sought inspiration in its great past. These "New Year flasks" reveal the technical excellence typical of their age.

The Egyptian New Year was originally in our July, but because their calendar of 365 days lacked a leap year, every four years their year slipped back a day. Exactly 2500 years ago, when these flasks were sent as greetings, the Egyptian New Year fell on our January 28.